

The SECRETARY OF FRIVOLOUS AFFAIRS

By MRS. JACQUES FUTRELLE

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

LOULIE CODMAN, narrator of the story, and her sister Josephine, daughters of an old New England family, were suddenly forced to earn their own living. They were rarely accomplished, and familiar with all the arts and graces of society. Loulie also went in for athletics. The latter engaged herself to Mrs. Maria Crowninshield Hazard, a society leader of Boston, as Secretary of Frivolous Affairs, also to influence her son Woodbury (known as Hap) to give up Natalie Sargent, whom he wished to marry, and to lure her daughter Laura away from Winthrop Abbott, an author, whom she favored.

Natalie lost a fifty thousand-dollar bracelet at a reception, and Loulie half suspected that the Duc de Trouville, the social sensation of the season, had something to do with it. The evidence seemed to point to Abbott, who had been present at previous similar "losses."

A wealthy family living near the Hazard country place was robbed of money and jewels, and again there was circumstantial evidence against Abbott.

Natalie accused Loulie of having stolen her ruby pendant; but the others refused to believe it, and Natalie herself admitted later that she had been mistaken.

Hap and Loulie confessed their love for each other. Abbott was arrested on suspicion of having committed all the jewelry robberies that had been bothering the Hazards; but Hap believed that some woman inmate of the house was guilty.

I FOUND Natalie replacing several books; but "The Almanach de Gotha" still lay open on the table. I delivered my message.

"Thanks," she said. "I'll be careful. Do you know what he wanted to ask me?"

"No."

"There wasn't anyone but the reporter?" she went on anxiously. "No detective, or policeman?"

"No one but the reporter," I replied. Then suddenly, "Would you mind telling me if you had any particular reason last night for changing your mind about me?"

"No," she replied, "I merely came to my senses. I'll

Chapter XVIII.

THE horror of Winthrop's arrest had not magnified overnight. The newspapers came out with a blare of headlines, "Noted Author Arrested, Accused of Vast Jewel Thefts—General Schuyler Shot!" Mrs. Hazard had gone on Winthrop's bail, and they made a lot of that, hinted at an engagement between the accused and Laura, endeavored to make John Crowninshield as counsel significant, tried to invent a mystery out of a balky carbureter, admitted that a mud headed detective might have made a mistake, and fizzled out toward the end like a wet firecracker. The story had no leg to stand on.

It was received in just that spirit at Lone Oak. There was some embarrassment at first; but Winthrop suspected of being a thief was so ridiculously absurd that before noon it was a joke.

Laura shed a few tears of honest concern at the breakfast table when she saw the silly thing in the papers; then she laughed. Mr. Abercrombie got hot under the collar, and told us all what he would do with the police when he was Governor; then laughed. Everybody else laughed, including his Grace, who merely knew it was a nice little *bon mot* of American humor. Only Natalie was serious.

I met her on the threshold of the wide doors that opened upon the terrace where the younger people were wildly welcoming the '09's as the motors arrived. She drew me back into the house, while I merely wondered what had brought her out so early. It was only ten.

"It's rather tragic about Mr. Abbott, isn't it?" she asked. The tone of her voice was unusual, and her attitude held a hint of excitement.

"Not now," I answered. "It looked that way last night; but this morning it is comedy, not tragedy. General Schuyler isn't badly hurt. Have you seen the newspapers?"

"Yes. I didn't know if the situation was better or worse; that's why I wanted to know from somebody—from you."

"Oh, the newspapers always try to make it worse, you know," I told her, "and even at that it's nothing. The jewels are Mr. Abbott's, and he can prove it. Except for the General having been shot, it's rather amusing and something to break the monotony. The boys have gone to bring Mr. Abbott. They're going to celebrate, or do something exciting. I know Mrs. Dykeman will think we have a press agent."

But my flippancy met no response from her. "I'm glad it isn't serious," she said.

I looked after her curiously as she went through the wide hallway and into the library; then I went out on the terrace. Winthrop had arrived with the '09's, who had gone for him, and just as I came out Lydia met him with outstretched hands.

"Good morning, Mr. Burglar," she laughed. "Where is your revolver and dark lantern? Did you wear a mask? And you were shot, too! Do you know you're such an interesting person and have furnished us such corking excitement that I'm tempted to hug you?"

Winthrop rubbed the back of his head reflectively, and the last bit of embarrassment disappeared in the laugh that went up.

I WAS mentally juggling my crowd and planning my schedule for the day, when a car that didn't belong to any of the '09's came up the driveway. It carried one passenger and a chauffeur, the passenger being a red headed young man whom I knew instantly. Hap knew him too. He reached the steps by the time the newspaper man did and politely managed to block his progress.

There was a curious silence on the terrace after whisperings as to the identity of the newcomer. Everybody was listening.

"See Miss Sargent?" we heard Hap repeat. "Awfully sorry. Miss Sargent is in town."

"Can you tell me where?" the reporter asked.

"She's shopping," Hap lied glibly. "Never know exactly where a woman is when she shops."

"Shopping?" repeated the reporter. "But—" He looked at Hap and smiled, glanced toward the front door, then frankly looked over Hap's shoulder at the crowd on the terrace. Hap noted the action and grinned. He swept his hand generally in our direction.

"You see she isn't here," he remarked affably. He was sure that Natalie was still up stairs in bed; but I knew better, and every minute expected to see her step through those doors to the terrace. I moved and stood where I could look down the hallway. The reporter glanced at the front door again. Not one of us thought of its being a holiday.

"Will she be back this afternoon?" the reporter asked.

"I hardly think so," Hap answered. "I think she's going to stay over and shop again tomorrow. And I really can't tell you where she's staying. It might be with her aunt, again it might be with her cousin, or yet

again it might be with a friend—" He'd have gone on like that until Doomsday, I suppose, if the reporter hadn't interrupted.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Abbott," the reporter said, and started suddenly for Winthrop. But Hap's foot was mysteriously in the way, and the newspaper man had hard work adjusting his equilibrium. "I'd like to ask him if he can positively prove that the emerald—"

Something happened, we could never say just what. But the reporter's hat was on the ground and Hap, picking it up to restore it to its owner with exaggerated courtesy, was babbling about the gorgeous sunshine and the delightful breeze from the east. Then he linked his arm through the reporter's—and it was just as well for that red headed young gentleman to go where he was being led. Five minutes later the car and the red headed reporter disappeared down the driveway.

Hap called me aside. "Will you go tell Natalie that a newspaper man has been here, and not to let him trick her into seeing him if he comes back?"

"She's in the library, if you want to tell her yourself," I told him.

He knew there was something odd in Natalie's being up so early. He did some thinking; but the result of his meditations he didn't confide to me.

"You tell her, Dear," he requested finally. "I want to talk to John."



Natalie Chose to Be Unconscious of the Stir Caused by Her Dazzling Entrance.